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AUTHOR Clarke, F. Alan
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ABSTRACT

This narrative account summarizes the 2-day research forum of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Presentations focus on the central theme of the forum: new qualifications versus skill shortages. They include Kees Meijer's outline of the research undertaken in a series of national studies on skill shortages within the European Community action program for the vocational training of young people and Juergen Schmehr's description of the regional approach and methods adopted by the "Skill Needs Monitoring Project." Papers and contributions from Member States illustrate the different ways in which individual countries approach the assessment of skill needs. Summaries are provided of Hermann Schmidt's discussion of Germany's response to identifying changing skill needs; Pol Debaty's introduction of the concept of "autoinformation"; Yves Lichtenberger's description of the move toward a stronger decentralization in France; and Juan Garcia Moreno's call for a greater regionalization of effort with reference to the Spanish situation. A description of the second day's program uses the Luxembourg experience as an example of how the legislature has accounted for the situation and needs of a minority (Jean Tagliaferri). Other highlights include a description of the evaluation and development of the Training and Enterprise Councils in the United Kingdom (Judith Marquand) and a review of the results of a pathfinding study conducted as part of the development of a European Directory of Research in the field of vocational training. (YLB)

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Responsible editors:
Ernst Piehl, Director
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Coordinator:
F. Alan Clarke
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CEDEFOP FORUM 1991

For the seventh year in succession, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) invited delegates from leading research institutes in the twelve Member States to attend its research FORUM. Designed originally to give the directors and researchers from these institutions an opportunity to exchange information and opinions regarding their priority areas of interest and concern both in the current year and for the future and to encourage bi- or multi-lateral cooperation in research amongst the Member States, the FORUM has for a number of years been opened to representatives from other, non-member countries. This year, delegations from Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and the U.S.A. also attended.

Traditionally, a central theme is chosen for each FORUM. This year, with the challenges of the Internal Market approaching rapidly, it was decided to address the issue of

"new qualifications versus skill shortages"

In recent years, considerable effort has been invested, both at national and Community level, in research into the many facets of this subject. Yet it is still an issue of topical concern affecting all countries, regardless of their level of industrial development or whether they have a high or low level of unemployment. It is also an issue which the Directors General for Vocational Training will be addressing at their meeting with the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (TFHR) of the EC Commission in the Hague on 24 and 25 October.

Accordingly, CEDEFOP particularly welcomed the presence at the FORUM of a Commission representative, Mr Jürgen Schmehr of the Task Force, who himself has played a lead role in the realization of a series of regional studies on skill shortages undertaken by the Commission at the request of the European Parliament.

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Following introductions by the Director of CEDEFOP, Ernst Piehl, and the Deputy Director Enrique Retuerto, Mr Kees Meijer of the Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociale Wetenschappen (ITS) in Nijmegen outlined the research undertaken in a series of national studies on skill shortages within the European Community action programme for the vocational training of young people (PETRA), ITS being the Technical Assistance Office assigned the task of implementing the programme. (The synthesis report on the studies with the provisional title *"Review of Educational and Training Responses to Changing Needs for Vocational Skills in Europe"* will be available in the near future.)

In his presentation, Mr Meijer stressed the importance of examining and developing methods and instruments for the observation and analysis of skill needs and shortages, and this was indeed one of the features on which the 1991 FORUM intended to focus.

It was generally agreed that the use of the term *"shortage"* in this context was less appropriate and that the key issue was more that of the mismatch between the need for skills and their availability. It was also acknowledged that the development of policies and action programmes to overcome this mismatch is highly dependent on the ability to assess and forecast skill needs accurately.

Mr Schmehr went on to describe the regional approach and methods adopted by the Commission in its survey on skill shortages conducted in 26 regions of the Community.

The *"Skill Needs Monitoring Project"* was launched in 1990 following an initiative of the European Parliament, who allocated a special budget to the Commission for its realization.

Drawing on the findings of former studies, including the scenario project undertaken as part of the CEDEFOP FORUM activities in 1987-1989, the project was designed to gather information on current skills deficits, future skill needs and the resultant demands on education and training in the '90s.

In the first pilot phase, four regions with different social and economic structures were selected: Dublin (Ireland), Nord-Pas de Calais (France), Western Greece and Thames Valley (UK), each of these subsequently becoming the coordinator for five other regions with a similar socio-economic structure.
Their task was to bring together the relevant parties in a region (the employers, professional associations, unions, the Chambers, public authorities and training

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providers) to investigate skill and training needs and to pool examples of good practice.

The findings of this exercise were presented and discussed at two conferences, which were held in Lille and Windsor this year. The results and proposals for further action will be examined in the coming weeks by the Task Force and a summary report on the project activities to date will be available from them in the coming weeks.

In concluding his presentation, Mr Schmehr put forward the view that on the international markets, the future battle for competitive advantage will be fought in the field of human resources and that infrastructural differences, such as those reflected by the different social security systems of the Member States, will play a significant role.

Whilst observing the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission, he said, would continue to play a catalytic role, encouraging and supporting transnational partnerships and European networks of training bodies, companies, employers and unions. In this context, he added, the national research institutes and CEDEFOP could make a valuable contribution towards the creation of a permanent European human resource analysis and forecasting system through which future training policy may be more effectively defined.

Turning to the Member States, the papers and contributions to the discussion illustrated the different ways in which the individual countries approach the assessment of skill needs; some give greater preference to sectoral analyses, others investigate the implications of change for job content and skills, and yet others tend to orient their studies to the needs of specific target groups, for example the long-term unemployed or women wishing to return to employment.

It was agreed that to obtain reliable information for analysis and forecasting, an integrated approach to the issue is essential. Some of the participants doubted, for example, the reliability of statements made by individual employers as regards their skill needs and recruitment problems. The divergent views on this point may well result from the differences in the role and responsibilities of the employers in the field of vocational training in the individual Member States. However, the regional survey conducted by the Task Force also supports the view that many employers, not only the small and medium firms, have difficulty in articulating their needs and are at best able to make only short-term forecasts.

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Whilst the employers are nevertheless seen to be a principal source of information in this area, these findings reinforce the call for an integrated approach to the problem, embodying the views and experience of the social partners and the expertise of specialist researchers.

Many countries already have well-established and complex structures which draw on some or all of these sources and which employ the traditional research methods of literature studies, company surveys, case studies and surveys amongst researchers. Nevertheless, a problem common to the Member States (and others) is that on the basis of available information, the vocational education and training systems have difficulty in identifying, and above all responding to changing skill needs and new qualification requirements.

The General Secretary of the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB), Dr Hermann Schmidt, indicated that the problem has been induced not only by the shift from production to the service sector experienced by many European countries nor simply in the mismatch between skills and job availability, but by other structural changes contributing to the rapid transformation of the world of work. The traditional response of providing extensive training to a high standard, even beyond demand, had proved satisfactory in the past but no longer sufficed. Now, the training system is called on to adapt itself more and more, and to find additional and alternative answers to the changing face of industry.

Dr Schmidt pointed out that in the more recent past, one answer had been seen in the development of so-called *"hybrid skills"*. But here, too, changes are occurring. Whereas the "hybrid" or "polyvalent" skills were sought in the combination of technical disciplines (*"mechatronics"* being quoted as an example), there is now a growing need for a combination of technical skills with managerial/organizational abilities.

Another factor demanding a new response is the growing cost of equipment and the rate at which it becomes obsolete. Schools and colleges are no longer able to keep up with the state of the art and consequently find it difficult, if not impossible, to adapt themselves to meet new skill demands.

A vision of firms being transformed into *"learning workplaces"* was presented and reference was made to examples of simulated learning within the work process already being practised in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and in the USA. There was also general agreement that the workforce itself should be integrated in the innovation process and in the planning and specification of the objectives, method and content of an appropriate training response.

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Mr Pol Debaty of the Office Communautaire et Régional de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi (FOREM) introduced the concept of *"autoformation"* as a means by which individuals could train themselves and develop the skills they need. In this context, reference is made to a recent publication of the EUROTECNET Technical Assistance Office drawn up on behalf of the EC Commission, Task Force Human Resources and which is concerned with European perspectives on self-learning competency and technological change.[1]

The discussion turned towards the emergence of new occupations and their related skill and training needs, and particular reference was made to demographic trends. As a result of the general fall in the birth rate and with the progress which has been made in the medical field, the older generations are staying healthier and, thanks to present day ease of travel and the growing prosperity of this population group are tending to become more mobile. This presents a challenge to the leisure industry, and especially the hotel and catering trade.

On the other side of the balance, there will be a growing demand for qualifications and training for occupations concerned with the health and care of the elderly.

As the studies conducted by the Task Force concluded, awareness in matters of environmental protection is increasing. It is therefore expected that a range of new skills will be in demand in this area, whether related to traditional production process activities or forming part of a separate discipline.

The aspect of changing infrastructures moved the discussion towards developments and tendencies in the Member States. Mr Yves Lichtenberger, Director of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les qualifications (CEREQ) referred to the move towards a stronger decentralization in France and to the work the regions will be undertaking through their "observatories" to monitor skill developments at regional and local levels. Despite the difficulties of employers in determining and expressing their needs, he nevertheless considered the "enterprise" to be *the* best vantage point for the observation.

Referring to the Spanish situation, Mr Juan Garcia Moreno, Subdirector General for Vocational Training from the Instituto Nacional del Empleo (INEM), also indicated that the need for a greater regionalization of effort was of utmost importance for the future.

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[1] Nyhan, B. (1991), *Developing People's Abilitiy to Learn*, EUROTECNET Technical Assistance Office (Ed.), European Interuniversity Press, Brussels.

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Mr Lichtenberger continued by describing French government plans to promote and develop "alternance", linking school-based and in-company training, and to raise the status of apprenticeship. He referred to the importance which, until then, had been placed on the more academic qualifications and cited a government objective of 1985 to the effect that 80% of school-leavers should attain a *baccalaureat*. This he said had not been entirely beneficial. As an example, he indicated that by raising the level of qualifications (and consequently the demand of employers) at the recruitment stage, problems relating to internal career prospects and promotion opportunities had arisen.

On the subject of "diagnosis", contributions were made by all delegations. It was not, however, possible in the time available, to deal exhaustively with the various approaches adopted by the Member States and other countries to determine the "skills deficits" relating to different occupations or groups of occupations. Reference was made to the various studies cited in the papers submitted for the FORUM.

CEDEFOP intends to collect and review this material in the coming weeks, together with the information which the delegates from the non-member countries volunteered to supply.

In summary, the outcome of the first day's discussions was as follows:

Human resource development is a factor of increasing strategic importance for the development of the economy. It follows that the *quality* of training is of paramount importance.

The *skills gap* affects all European economies, regardless of their degree of development, their levels of employment and the extent to which the world of training and the world of work are linked.

A *skills shortage* does not necessarily imply the need for *new qualifications* but more likely involves a *matching* of existing skills to the changing needs of industry. This might entail the development of broader based *key skills* or of *"hybrid"* skills combining technical and organizational knowledge and abilities.

Concerning the monitoring, analysis and forecasting of skill needs, it is necessary to employ an *integrated approach* involving all the *"actors"* having a key role to play in this issue.

The diagnosis of skill and training needs should, if it is to produce reliable information, take place at a *regional and local level*.

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It is necessary to develop appropriate ways and means of *disseminating the information obtained* in order to enable it to be "translated" into a suitable training response.

The Commission, CEDEFOP and the research institutes of the Member States can make a valid joint contribution towards the development and operation of a *European skills monitoring system*.

The second day's programme provided for a round-table presentation and discussion of other priority areas of research and recent significant developments in the different countries. Much of the time was devoted to a review, country by country, of administrative and institutional structures and the changes that had occurred there.

The Luxembourg experience can be singled out as an example of how the legislator has accounted for the situation and needs of a minority, albeit a *large* minority population.

Mr Jean Tagliaferri of the Ministry of National Education and Youth pointed out that in Luxembourg, migrant workers account for roughly one third of the Luxembourg community. Most of them have their origins in countries with a Romanic language, the largest group being Portuguese.

Whilst the official administrative language of Luxembourg is French, vocational training has so far been conducted in German, the language most closely related to that of the native population, Letzeburgesch.

In order to enable the migrant population (a term to which the European Community must give some thought in relationship to the completion of the Internal market) to surmount the language barrier more easily, and by consequence to improve the success rate of the trainees, the Luxembourg government has decided that as part of a more general reform of the education and training systems, training shall now be conducted in French.

Ms Judith Marquand from the UK Department of Employment, who joined the Forum on its second day, described the substantial research effort being invested in evaluation and development of the Training and Enterprise Councils (the *TECs*) and their Scottish counterparts the Local Enterprise Companies (the *LECs*). The results of the research and evaluation are expected to be available next year.

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Other points of the discussion are featured in the papers for the FORUM.

As a result of the increased number of participants at this year's FORUM, the time available for discussion had to be "rationed". Nevertheless, the "newcomers" had ample opportunity to describe the institutional features of their countries and outline some of the more important current issues.

In consequence and of necessity, the discussion of the final point on the agenda, the development of a European Directory of Research in the field of vocational training, was accorded less time than scheduled, so that the presentation was essentially limited to a review of the results of the "pathfinding" study conducted on behalf of CEDEFOP by Dott.ssa Lilia Infelise of ARTES and a subsequent exchange of general views.

Ms Infelise explained the survey she had undertaken, and her talks/interviews with representatives of a number of the research institutions present at the FORUM. The objective had been to map out a series of options for the frame in which the Directory could be set. This included defining the potential user groups, the type of research activity to be covered, the type of product to be aimed at (for example, annual reports on trends and policies, a one-project/one-record database, a statistical database ...) as related to the user groups.

The study also looked into the aspects of selection criteria, classification and the more technical issue of data collection systems and management and control instruments.

The ensuing, lively discussion centred on the feasibility of what appeared at first sight to be an enormous undertaking. It was pointed out that the idea for such a Directory had first been voiced by the Commission and that from the discussions with the Task Force, the concept had from the outset been limited in scope to research commissioned by public bodies.

For the development of the concept and its initial practical implementation, choices would be made which would not only limit this first selection criterion further, but which would contain the scope to a small number of key areas.

The concept for an initial practical implementation phase will be discussed further within CEDEFOP and with the Task Force, following which a proposal will be submitted to the Management Board of CEDEFOP for approval.

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In his closing address, Mr Helmut Brumhard, Vice-Chairman of CEDEFOP's Management Board, reaffirmed the value of the regular FORUM meetings not only as an occasion to present information and obtain "new knowledge", but also as an opportunity, through a personal, face-to-face exchange, to acquire a new perspective to the policies and research activities undertaken by the participant organizations in their own countries, and, perhaps more significantly, to gain a greater appreciation of the European dimension of their effort in terms of a better mutual understanding.

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